FOREIGN ACTION

EA-8

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ARA	EUR	FE
NEA	CU	INR 5
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GR	COM	FRB
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RMY 3	CIA 20	NAVY 5
OSD 33	USIA 10	NSA 3
JCS 3	SFA 1	NSC 6

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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A-772 NO. | CONFIDENTIAL | AIR POUCH HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO: BANGKOK, VIENTIANE, CINCPAC, DA NANG

RECEIVED DEPARTMENT OF STATE JUN 30 11 05 AM 1967 RSB/AN ANALYSIS BRANCH

IEDK

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: June 22, 1967

SUBJECT : Presidential Election as seen from Kien Hoa

REF :

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

Interest in the coming Presidential elections is quite high in Kien Hoa, the Delta's most populous province. Three of the presidential candidates have reportedly sent advance men down to get their machines rolling. Although often unwilling to express a preference, it nonetheless seems clear that many residents of Kien Hoa have one. As the enclosed memoranda of conversation indicate, some of Kien Hoa's more prominent citizens think that Prime Minister Ky will win, but personally do not support him. On the other hand, Tran Van Huong apparently has considerable genuine support in Kien Hoa. A number of local observers tended to discount both Phan Khac Suu and Ha Thuc Ky, but without exception said Huong was a good man and would make an excellent president. One reason for Huong's popularity in Ben Tre may be his association with My Tho, less than ten miles away, where Huong was a school teacher. People in Ben Tre seem to look on him as "one of ours."

BUNKER

Enclosures:
1. Conversation with Mr. Nguyen Thi Gioi
2. Conversation with Mr. Nguyen Binh Khiem
3. Conversation with Mr. Nguyen Dinh Hieu

Action assigned to

Action Taken

Date of Action

Action Office Symbol

Name of Officer

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Szuberg DATE 10/5/81
RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON: CONFIDENTIAL
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☒
DECLASSIFIED ☒ RELEASABLE ☑
EXEMPTIONS

Drafted by: POL:DFLambertson:KSRichardson:eac

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:JACalhoun

Clearances: POL:TMEckenrode

POL:DFLambertson

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1961 JUN 30

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Conversation with Nguyen Thi Gioi

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Nguyen Thi Gioi, former province chief of Kien Hoa and leader of Kien Hoa VNQDD
K.S. Richardson, Second Secretary of Embassy

During the course of a conversation at his home, Mr. Gioi expressed a number of decided opinions about the upcoming presidential elections. Chief of these was that Prime Minister Ky appears to be a shoo-in -- not because he is popular with the people, but because he has such an unfair advantage that there is no alternative. He said that Americans compare elections in Viet Nam to elections in the United States, and thereby deceive themselves. Gioi inquired at length about the policy of the United States with regard to the election, and doubted my assertion that the Mission was completely neutral in fact as well as in theory.

Mr. Gioi believes that the main quality a candidate must possess is honesty. Although he declined to state which candidates meet that requirement, he made it clear that in his opinion neither General Thieu nor General Ky is an honest man. He also said that a president must have had experience in running the government, indicating that perhaps Tran Van Huong best fills the bill. Gioi spoke of Huong as an honest, educated man.

Even though Mr. Gioi thinks that a civilian would make the best president, he is not sanguine about the chances of civilian candidates. He said that the only way to insure a fair contest would be for Prime Minister Ky to immediately resign his position. Mr. Gioi said that the Prime Minister, in addition to being able to order provincial and district chiefs to produce votes, could count on the support of the military and civil servants, as well as their families. When I pointed out that Gioi has sons in the Army, but obviously does not intend to vote for a military candidate, he replied, "I am one of the few who think and weigh matters." Gioi said that a civilian president would face problems with the military. He questioned whether a civilian could effectively cope with the Generals and said that they would probably overthrow a president whom they did not like.

Kien Hoa residents are aware of the candidates and their merits, according to Mr. Gioi. He said that three of the announced candidates had sent advance men down to start electioneering, a statement which was confirmed by other people with whom I spoke. Gioi said the relatively low turnout in the recent hamlet elections was understandable because hamlet officials are not very important, and people are becoming rather tired of elections.

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Biographic Note:

Mr. Gioi is 63 years old. He was born in Chau Doc Province, but has lived most of his life in Kien Hoa, and has served as province chief. He is the Kien Hoa chief of the VNQDD, which he says includes only about 200 "card-carrying members" but has many more sympathizers. Mr. Gioi at present seems to be fulfilling a sort of ombudsman position: two local residents, a soldier and a young girl, came to his house with apparent grievances in the hour and a half I was there. Gioi is outspoken about the alleged corruption of local officials, and characterized the Binh Dai district chief as "a pirate, a brigand." He claims that mail addressed to him is opened by provincial officials before it reaches him. Mr. Gioi is a Buddhist. He speaks excellent French and a little English.

KSR

POL:KSRichardson:eac
6-22-67

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Conversation with Nguyen Binh Khiem

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Nguyen Binh Khiem, Catholic businessman and unsuccessful candidate for Constitutional Assembly
K.S. Richardson, Second Secretary of Embassy
B.S. Kirkpatrick, Second Secretary of Embassy

Local residents have not yet begun thinking seriously about presidential elections, according to Mr. Khiem. From his comments, however, it is obvious that Mr. Khiem himself has thought about them a great deal. He said that although he did not think Prime Minister Ky would be a good president, his victory seems inevitable. General Ky controls transportation, said Mr. Khiem, and therefore can make himself known to the people more effectively than any other candidate. He said further that the Prime Minister has unlimited financial resources and can expect support from the military, civil servants, and their families. Even if General Thieu decides to run, he probably cannot beat General Ky for the reasons mentioned above. Mr. Khiem is opposed to a military president, but feels Thieu would be preferable to Ky. "Mr. Ky talks a lot, but does little," said Mr. Khiem, "while Mr. Thieu says little but does much." Mr. Khiem spoke of Tran Van Huong as a man of honesty and intelligence, but said he doesn't have the necessary financial resources to be elected. Khiem criticized as undemocratic the provision in the electoral law requiring candidates to put up money in order to run. He also disapproved of the provision (since stricken from the law) which would have required candidates to be sponsored by 30 elected officials.

The Catholics in Kien Hoa cannot be expected to vote as a bloc, according to Mr. Khiem. He said that unlike most other religious groups, Catholics are not cohesive, and their vote will be split among several candidates. The religion of a candidate is not important, he averred, most important are the man's ability and integrity.

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6-22-67

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Conversation with Nguyen Dinh Hieu

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Nguyen Dinh Hieu, Chairman of Kien Hoa Provincial Council and the Provincial Parent-Teachers Association
K.S. Richardson, Second Secretary of Embassy
B.S. Kirkpatrick, Second Secretary of Embassy

Mr. Hieu was rather cautious in his comments about presidential candidates, noting that "every man has his strong and weak points." He said that support for Tran Van Huong was quite strong in Kien Hoa, especially among the students and intelligentsia. Hieu said that he himself had studied under Huong when the latter taught school at My Tho. If Huong can line up the support of the Buddhists, he can win the election, according to Hieu, who is himself a Buddhist and reportedly a member of the United Buddhist Association. Referring to Generals Ky and Thieu, he gave Thieu little chance but said that he could take votes away from Ky. Hieu said further that Ha Thuc Ky has virtually no chance of winning. Although Hieu had given a cautious, balanced view of the presidential elections, he said categorically as we left, "General Ky will win."

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